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NEWS RELEASE

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Rhode Island wins Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge grant State to receive federal funds to improve preschool programs

For the second time in two years, the U.S. Department of Education has awarded Rhode Island a major federal grant to transform education across the state.

The Department, along with the Department of Health and Human Services, announced today (December 16, 2011) that Rhode Island is one of 9 winners of a Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge grant, which could bring \$50 million to the state over the next four years to improve early learning. The Education Department is expected to inform Rhode Island about the amount of the grant next week.

Last year, the Education Department awarded Rhode Island a Race to the Top grant of \$75 million to transform education across the state. Today's award makes Rhode Island one of only 6 states to win two Race to the Top awards.

"As we work to improve education in Rhode Island, we must focus our efforts on the education of our youngest students. Success in the early years is the foundation for all that follows," said Governor Lincoln D. Chafee. "The grant we have received today will improve the quality of early learning for all children in Rhode Island, with a special focus on increasing access for high-needs populations. This award will benefit our state for many years to come."

"I congratulate Commissioner Gist and the many Rhode Island educators and early-childhood professionals who developed this winning Race to the Top application," said Speaker of the House Gordon D. Fox. "These federal funds will help improve the lives of Rhode Island children and will prepare them for success in school, which will benefit our state for many years to come."

"This grant award is all about our children and giving them every opportunity to become successful adults," said Senate President M. Teresa Paiva Weed. "Strong public-private partnerships led to Rhode Island receiving this grant, and working together we will continue to help our youngest children benefit from excellence in education."

"As we move rapidly forward with our work to improve our public schools, we are also aware that we need to support and develop a high-quality system of prekindergarten education," said George D. Caruolo, Chairman of the Board of Regents for Elementary and Secondary Education. "With this Early Learning Challenge grant, we can ensure that we will have high standards, strong measures of quality, and extensive professional development and other

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resources for our preschool children and for those who teach them. We are grateful and honored that the U.S. Department of Education has once again recognized our commitment to transforming education.”

“As an educator who began my career as an early-childhood teacher, I am especially proud that Rhode Island received an Early Learning Challenge grant that will dramatically improve schools and programs for all of our children,” said Deborah A. Gist, Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education. “This grant is the result of the partnerships we formed with educators, school leaders, health-care and human-services providers, and community members, and these partnerships will guide us as we move forward together to put this grant into action. Our goal is to make our schools – including our preschools and early-childhood programs – America’s best.”

“The receipt of this federal funding will further our efforts to improve and increase early-learning opportunities for Rhode Island’s children,” stated Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Co-Chair of the Rhode Island Early Learning Council and Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT. “Ensuring access to high-quality early learning programs is a key strategy to close the preparation gap that is evident for many children when they enter kindergarten and will help all children succeed in school and reach their full potential”

The R.I. Department of Education (RIDE) developed the \$50-million grant application with the leadership of the Rhode Island Early Learning Council, which includes several key partners in the grant: the Executive Office of Health & Human Services (Steven M. Costantino, secretary); the Department for Children, Youth, and Families (Janice E. DeFrances, Ed.D., director); the Department of Health (Michael Fine, M.D., director); the Department of Human Services (Sandra Powell, director); the Department of Labor and Training (Charles Fogarty, director); and Rhode Island KIDS COUNT (Elizabeth Burke Bryant, executive director).

The council membership also includes representatives of Beautiful Beginnings Child Care Center, Brown University, Family Child Care Homes of Rhode Island, Hasbro Children’s Hospital, the Providence Public Schools, Ready to Learn Providence, the Rhode Island Association for the Education of Young Children, the Rhode Island Child Care Facilities Fund, the Rhode Island Foundation, Rhode Island Head Start, the Rhode Island Training and Technical Assistance Center, United Way of Rhode Island, the University of Rhode Island Child Development Center, and the Westbay Children’s Center.

The Rhode Island application focused on four main categories of action:

- developing high-quality, accountable programs;
- promoting early learning and development outcomes for children;
- building a great early-childhood education workforce; and
- measuring outcomes and progress.

Some examples of the work that the grant will support include:

- revising and expanding the child-care program quality-rating system (Brightstars) to provide the training, guidance, and incentives to raise the quality of all early learning programs;
- providing high-quality professional development and increased access to higher education to individuals working in early-learning programs;
- building upon our statewide data systems to develop clear, accurate, in-depth knowledge about all of our children, their teachers, and all of our schools and programs and to monitor students’ progress and success from birth through their college years; and
- working with educators and assessments experts to develop a statewide “kindergarten-entry assessment” so that we better understand what instructional support our youngest children need and what strengths they bring as they arrive for their first day of school.

To view the Rhode Island application, go to:

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/OSCAS/earlychild/>

For more information about the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge, see:

<http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop-earlylearningchallenge/faq.html>